

IAPP An Interview with the Chairman of the FTC (2 – 3 p.m. @49:52)

Joseph Simons, Chairman, Federal Trade Commission, Omer Tene, VP, Chief Knowledge Officer, IAPP

Tene> There's not Chief Technologists now. I know Jessica Rich and Former Chairwoman Ramirez took great pride in establishing this tech unit. How can the FTC address these incredible technological issues: AI, machine learning, black boxes, facial recognition... what have you.... without having enough firepower and tech staff?

Simons> This is one of things I started looking at immediately upon getting to the FTC 'cause the fellow that was the Chief Technology Officer was leaving. And the first thing that struck me was that: the Chief Technology Officer is positioned in a very odd place in the organizational structure of the FTC. The Chief Technology Officer had been appended to the Chairman's office. There's no infrastructure supporting the CTO and there was no existing channels for the CTO to interact specifically with one group or another group or one bureau or divisions within that bureau for that matter. And so I started to look around and talk to people and try to think about "ok what is the best organizational structure to use our technology assets?". So one of the things I thought about originally was creating a Bureau of Technology and what I realized after a while was, we have a lot of technology resources in the Bureau of Consumer Protection and the Office of Technology Research and Investigation (OTech) and also there are technologists in DPIP and maybe other places too.

Um, and those folks are functioning extremely well. They're very well integrated, the parts of the bureau that rely on them are extremely happy with them -- and they all got really nervous when I started talking about a Bureau of Technology and taking those folks out of the Bureau of Consumer Protection and putting them into a new bureau. And that was one main issue.

The second issue was that the Bureau of Competition didn't have anything similar. They had relied... they would consult sometimes, depending on who the Chief Technologist was, but it wasn't kind of an embedded function. It wasn't a boots on the ground type of thing. And what they've told me is that they would prefer is to have their own technologist. So what we did is we created this technology task force where we brought in lawyers that had technology experience as well as create a position called this Technology Fellow which is someone who is, and we're still working this out, but someone who probably is a recent PhD graduate in Computer Science or something like that. And in addition, I've transferred the FTE [Full Time Employee] from my office, the CTO, into the technology task force. So we still have the same number of people doing technology as we had before, but even more because we have this Technology Fellow, but they're now embedded where the investigations are occurring. And we'll see, my sense is probably it'll work better for everybody but we're going to try.

Tene> But instead of the Bureau of Technology, there's this taskforce in the Bureau of Competition and you'll continue on the same path with the technology resources in the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Simons> Ya, that's what we're going to try.